

Rev. Josh Pawelek
Testimony on SB 312, An Act Concerning Expansion of Connecticut's Paid Sick Days and HB,
5356 An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay For Essential Workers.
Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and the distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

I am the Rev. Josh Pawelek, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society: East in Manchester. I am submitting written testimony in solidarity with the Recovery for All Coalition and the Domestic Worker Justice Campaign. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of two bills that will provide critical relief to our state's most vulnerable workers: Senate Bill 312, An Act Concerning Expansion of Connecticut's Paid Sick Days, and House Bill 5356, An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay For Essential Workers.

If we've learned nothing else from two years of pandemic living, we've learned that people who are sick, or who are caring for sick family members, need to take time off from work for healing. Without reasonable sick day benefits, their work and their workplace suffer, their capacity for healing suffers, their families suffer, and if their illness is any kind of communicable disease, they are more likely to spread it to co-workers. SB 312 updates Connecticut's existing paid sick days law to cover all workers, regardless of their job title or the size of their employer. It removes the law's 680 hour waiting period before a worker can use the paid sick leave they've accrued. And it expands the definition of "family" to honor non-traditional family structures through which people deliver care.

Paid sick days are especially important for frontline and essential workers, the majority of whom are women and people of color and are least likely to have access to paid sick days right now. For example, research shows that 55% of retail, grocery and fast food workers do not have access to paid sick days. Without paid sick days, workers are forced to either go to work sick or miss their paycheck and in some cases, lose their job entirely.

We also know that workers without paid sick days are more than twice as likely as those with paid sick days to seek emergency room care for themselves, a child or a relative because they can't take time away from work during normal business hours to obtain routine care. These expensive emergency trips end up replacing routine medical appointments and preventive care, leading to higher health insurance costs for businesses and higher family medical expenses for workers.

SB 312 addresses these core gaps in our existing paid sick days law. It removes the employer size threshold and job classification list outlined in the law and requires all employers, regardless of size or industry, to provide paid sick days to their employees. It changes the waiting period for use of paid sick days from 680 hours to immediately after the commencement of employment. It allows workers to take paid sick time to care for a child of any age, as well as members of their chosen family. It expands paid sick days to include time to care for any family member who has

experienced family violence or sexual assault. It provides an additional 80 hours of paid sick leave for COVID-19 related purposes and allows sick time to be used when a worker's place of work or child's school/place of care is closed by public health officials for a public health emergency.

These proposed changes to Connecticut's paid sick time law would create a more humane, supportive and realistic environment for all workers, especially the most vulnerable. It would create a clearer, more safe, more reliable system for employers. Please support SB 312.

HB 5356 is the very least we can do as a state for everyone who did essential work during the pandemic. For two years we've been referring to a whole range of essential or frontline workers as heroes. They've continued working in person, often in dangerous pandemic conditions, exposing themselves and their families to illness and, at times, death. Thus it is time for Connecticut to demonstrate its gratitude to all essential workers, not with yard signs, platitudes and handshakes, but with financial compensation. Offering hero pay to all essential workers acknowledges the sacrifice they made on behalf of the rest of us.

would provide two thousand dollars to each full-time essential worker and one thousand dollars to each part-time essential worker, regardless of immigrant status, including domestic workers. Recovery for All is preparing a testimony guide which we can share with you as soon as possible.

Each person who wants to testify **at the Labor Committee on Tuesday, you must sign up before 3 pm on Monday, March 7.** [Please click this link to sign up.](#) You should also email written testimony to LABtestimony@cga.ct.gov.

On Thursday, March 10th, the Human Services Committee will hear a bill championed by CT Students for a Dream (C4D) and many other immigrant rights groups: "SB 284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS." The bill language is here: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2022/TOB/S/PDF/2022SB-00284-R00-SB.PDF>.

C4D is working to produce materials for people who wish to testify. If this feels like something you'd like to do, please let me know at minister@uuse.org, and I will forward the info to you as soon as possible.

Note: These hearings begin in the morning and typically last all day. If you sign up to testify in person, they will generate a random speaker order, which will give you some indication of what time you'll be speaking.